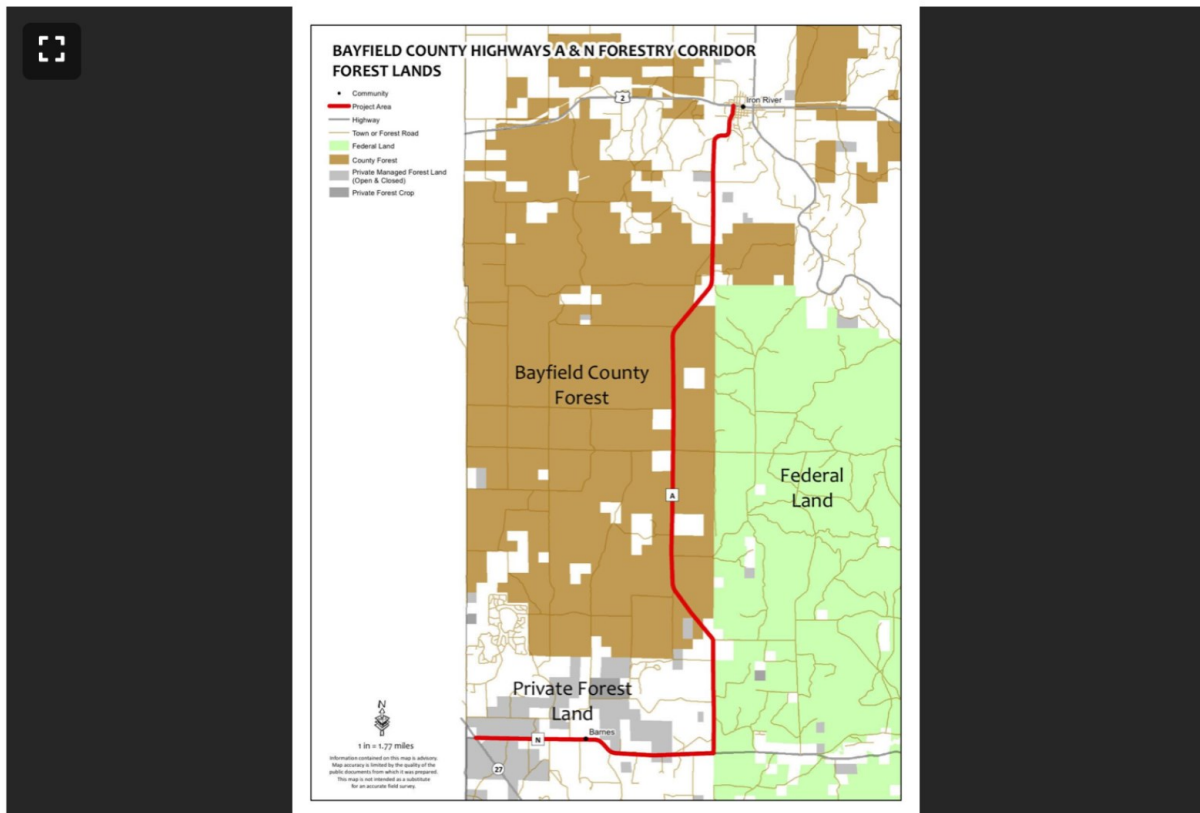


Bayfield County seeks \$13M highway grant to allow year-round logging

By RICK OLIVO rolivo@ashlanddailypress.net 19 hrs ago



Bayfield County highways A and N are shown in a detail of the county map. The 22 miles of highway would be rebuilt to withstand heavier weight and would no longer be subject to seasonal weight restrictions if the county obtains federal infrastructure funds for the project, allowing loaded logging trucks to use the roads year-round.



Max Ericson is a fourth-generation logger from Minong who says he can't afford to have his equipment and crews idled every spring.

"My family has four processors, 10 trucks and three skidders, and they have to run year-round. We can't sit for three months and wait for the roads to thaw out," he said.

A lot of the timber cut by Ericson Logging is from county and federal forests of Bayfield County, bisected by Highway A running from Iron River south to Highway N, which then runs west through the village of Barnes to Highway 27.

Like many county highways, A and N have weight restrictions placed on them as winter ends and the frost slowly works itself out of the ground, to keep the roadbeds from being damaged by heavy truck loads during the thaw. This helps save money on highway maintenance, but it is an annual problem for loggers like Ericson who need to move truckloads of timber out of the woods to stay in business.



Erickson

It is also a thorny problem for county officials who are torn between two conflicting

excessive downtime. But now, at least for Highways A and N, a permanent solution may be in the offing.

The county is seeking a federal Department of Transportation grant to convert the roadways to all-season highways that would be capable of handling the heavy loads of timber throughout the year.

Bayfield County Administrator Mark Abeles-Allison said the funds would come from the Rebuilding American Infrastructure with Sustainability and Equity, or RAISE discretionary grant program, which has dedicated about \$8.9 billion since 2009 to infrastructure investments across the nation.



Highway A in Bayfield County is surrounded by county and federal forestlands. The rebuilt road would allow timber to be harvested in spring when highways are thawing and heavy trucks can't now operate.



The Bayfield County project would total about \$13 million, with about \$2.5 million of that committed by the county.

"These are very competitive grants; they really look at projects that impact economic development, projects that will make a big difference for a community," Abeles-Allison said.

There is no question that the money would make a difference, said logger George Dalbeck of Wakefield, Mich., who also cuts timber in Bayfield County.

"It would help the timber industry and it would help Bayfield County," he said. "It makes their timber worth more, and it's a shorter route. There are a lot of industries that could be using that road if it was all-season."

More than 80% of Bayfield County is forested and timber production accounts for \$8.9 million of the county's economic output. As an owner of forest property, the county can also suffer if the standing timber it marks for sale every year can't be harvested in a timely fashion.

Dalbeck said because the forest in the area is on sandy soils, it was more suitable for logging in the early spring than wood growing on the wet clay soils of other parts of the forest.

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Dalbeck

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only spruce than wood growing on the wet clay soils



Rebuilding the county highways also would keep heavy logging trucks off of lightly constructed town roads.

"It raises hell with all the towns because we have to go across all these town roads to get to Highway 27 as opposed to Highway A, which is a much shorter route," Dalbeck said.

Abeles-Allison said that while fewer than 100 grants likely would be made this year, the program focuses on rural areas so Bayfield County — which can use any infrastructure improvements it can get — is a good candidate.

"In the last five years, we have had two major corridors, Highway 63 and Highway 2 that were closed due to flooding and culvert catastrophes. Those were major state thoroughfares through the county," he said. "What we are trying to do is to create some additional resilience, some alternate north-south routes."

The proposal also would create a pair of electric-vehicle charging stations at either end of the project, Abeles Allison said.

The winners of the grants are to be announced in November and construction would likely take place in 2024 or 2025 if Bayfield County is approved, Ables Allison said.

Meanwhile, Ericson sees the highway improvements as a key to the logging industry's future success.

"It's huge for our industry. If we can get the costs down to us, we could pay more for stumpage and hopefully get rid of more," he said.